

SATIRE 2

Hypocritical Perverts

One longs to escape from here beyond Sarmatia and the frozen sea, when some people dare to pronounce on morality—those who

affect the Curii's style while living a Bacchic orgy.

First, they are ignorant, in spite of the plaster casts of Chrysippus

that fill their houses. The nearest any of them comes to culture is to buy a copy of Aristotle's head or Pittacus' image, or to have an original bust of Cleanthes placed on their sideboard.

Faces are not to be trusted. Why, every street is just full of stern-faced sodomites. How can you lash corruption when you

are the most notorious furrow among our Socratic fairies?

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Hirsute limbs, it is true, and arms that are stiff with bristles, bespeak 'a soul of adamant'; but your anus is smooth, as the surgeon

notes with a grin when he takes a knife to your swollen piles. Such fellows rarely talk. They've a mighty passion for silence; and they keep their hair as short as their eyebrows. Peribomius, therefore,

provides a more honest and genuine case. *That* I put down to the workings of fate. His walk and expression proclaim his disorder.

Such folk, by their candour, call for pity; their very obsession secures indulgence. Far worse are those who condemn perversions

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in Hercules' style, and having held forth about manly virtue, wriggle their rumps. As the vile Varillus retorted to Sextus: 'Am I to respect a spaniel like you? You're no better than I am!'

Let the straight-limbed laugh at the cripple, the white at the negro;
 but who could endure the Gracchi inveighing against sedition?
 Would you not think the sky had fallen and the seas run dry,
 if Verres expressed an abhorrence of thieves, and Milo of
 murderers?

if Clodius railed at seducers of wives, Catiline at Cethégus;
 if Sulla's trio of pupils thundered against proscriptions?
 Lately we saw such a man—an adulterer stained by a union
 worthy of the tragic stage—reviving harsh legislation
 which brought alarm to all, even to Mars and Venus,
 at the very time when Julia was relieving her fertile womb
 of so many a foetus, with every lump the image of Uncle.
 So isn't it fair and just that the most depraved should be scornful
 of bogus Scauri, and, when chastised, should snap in reprisal?

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When one of those grim-faced ascetics was crying 'O Julian law,
 where are you now? Wake up!' Laronia could not endure it,
 and answered thus with a smile: 'It's a happy age that has you,
 sir,

to reform its morals; Rome had better clean itself up;
 a third Cato has dropped from the sky! But seriously, tell me,
 where did you get that lovely scent that is wafted in waves
 from your hairy neck? You mustn't be shy about naming the
 shop.

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If laws and statutes have to be wakened, you'd better begin,
 then,

by calling the Scantinian. Turn your attention first to the
 menfolk,

and scrutinize *them*. What they do is worse, yet they are
 defended

by their sheer numbers—serried ranks with shields
 interlocking.

Great unanimity reigns amongst effeminate; women
 provide not a single case of such disgusting behaviour.

Tedia doesn't lick Cluvia's body, nor Flora Catulla's.

Hispo accommodates men, and is addicted to both perversions.

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Do any of *us* plead at the bar, or set up to be experts
 in civil law, or disturb your courts by causing an uproar?

Few of us wrestle; few of us feed on fighters' meat.
 You card wool; and when you have finished, you carry the
 fleeces

back in baskets; you twirl the big-bellied spindle, and finger
 the fine-spun thread, Penelope's peer, more deft than Arachne,
 much like that slighted woman who sits, unkempt, on a tree-
 stump.

Everyone knows why Hister bequeathed his all to a freedman,
 and why, when he lived, he showered gifts on his girlish wife. 60
 The woman who sleeps third in a bed is bound to be wealthy.
 Marry and shut your mouth; the price of silence is rubies.
 In view of all this, does our sex deserve the verdict of guilty?
 Our censor's rule condemns the doves while acquitting the
 ravens.'

On hearing such evident truths our Stoic brethren decamped
 in disorder; for who could deny what Laronia said? But what
 will the others stop at when Creticus wears a dress of chiffon,
 and, as the audience stares at his clothes, inveighs against wives
 like Prócula, say, or Pollitta? Fabulla dishonours her husband.
 Condemn Carfinia too, if you wish. But however guilty,
 she'll never be seen in a gown like that. 70

'But this is July, dear;
 I'm hot!'

Then plead in your loincloth; lunacy's less degrading.
 What a garb for presenting new laws and enactments
 before a community fresh from its triumphs, with wounds still
 open—

mountain folk who have left their ploughs to come and hear
 you!

Think of what you would say if you saw such clothes being
 worn

by a judge. I question if even a witness should appear in chiffon.
 Creticus, fiery and headstrong, master of fearless expression,
 you're shining through! This plague of yours has been caught
 through contact,

and will spread to others, as in the country a single pig
 with scab or mange can cause the collapse of the total herd,
 and as one grape can develop mould at the sight of another. 80

Soon you will venture something worse than a matter of clothing.

No one sinks to the bottom at once. Little by little you will come to be welcomed within the houses of characters wearing

bonnets with flowing ribbons, and chokers around their necks. These placate the Bona Dea with a young sow's belly and a generous bowl of wine. But inverting the normal custom, they drive all *women* away, and forbid them to enter the doorway.

The goddess's altar is only for men. 'Away with you, women, outsiders all! No girl plays here on a groaning oboe!' 90

Such were the secret torchlight orgies in which the Dippers used to disgust the goddess Cotyto in Cecrops' city.

One, with a slanting pencil, lengthens his eyebrows, touching them up with moistened soot; raising his fluttering lids, he blackens the rims. Another drinks from a phallic wine-glass, the billowing mass of his hair confined in a golden hairnet.

He wears a blue checked robe, or a garment of greenish satin; and his servant swears by his master's 'Juno'—a sign of his gender.

A third is clutching a mirror—the gear of Otho the pathic, taken off the Auruncan Actor. He saw himself in it, clad in full armour just as he ordered the troops to advance. (A kit in a civil war containing a mirror—now *there's* a thing which rated a mention in the recent annals and history. It was surely the mark of a supreme commander to eliminate Galba

and to take care of his skin, to aspire to the throne of the emperor 105 *and* to put bread on his face, spreading it out with his fingers. 107

The quivered Semiramis never did *that* in the realm of Assyria, nor did the fierce Cleopatra on board her Actian warship.)

No restraint in language here or respect for the table; 110 here is Cybele's crew, with their uninhibited babel of squeaky voices. A crazy old man with snow-white hair presides at the rites, a rare and truly remarkable case of voracious greed. He ought to be paid to give master classes. But why hold back? It's time to follow the Phrygian mode: just take a knife, and sever the lump of useless meat.

Four hundred thousand is the size of the dowry given by
 Gracchus
 to a cornet player (or perhaps his horn was the straight variety).
 The contract is signed, the blessing pronounced, a numerous
 party
 is waiting; the newly-wed 'bride' reclines in the lap of her 120
 husband.

Shades of our forefathers! Is it a censor we need, or an augur?
 Would you feel more horror, or think it more appalling a
 portent,

If a woman dropped a calf, or a cow gave birth to a lamb?
 A long dress with veil and flounces is worn by a man
 who carried a sacred shield of Mars by its mystic thong,
 sweating beneath the swaying burden. Father of our city,
 from where did such evil come to your Latin shepherds? From
 where

did this itch arise, o Lord of War, to plague your descendants?
 Look—a man of family and fortune—being wed to a man!
 Do you not shake your helmet or bang the ground with your
 spear, 130
 or complain to your father? Away, then; quit the strenuous acres
 of that great Park which you have forgotten.

'At dawn tomorrow
 I have to keep an appointment, down in Quirinus' valley.'
 'What's the occasion?'

'What do you think? A friend's being
 married—
 a small affair.' Such things, before we're very much older,
 will be done in public—in *public*, and will want to appear in the
 papers!

These brides, however, are racked by one intractable problem:
 they cannot conceive, and hold their husbands by having a baby.
 It is well that Nature has given no power to their twisted
 emotions
 over their bodies. They die without issue. For them no
 assistance 140

can be had from the bloated Lyde with her box of fertility drugs,
 nor does it help to proffer their hands to the running Luperci.
 (Gracchus surpassed even this enormity when, with tunic

and trident, he appeared as a fighter, and was chased across the arena,

a Roman of nobler birth than the Manlii or the Marcelli, yes, or the scions of Catulus and Paulus, or the Fabian family, or all the onlookers there in their front-row places, including the man who provided the show where Gracchus cast his net.)

That there are such things as spirits of the dead and infernal regions,

the river Cocytus, and the Styx with inky frogs in its waters, 150
that so many thousands cross the stream in a single skiff, not even children believe, unless they're still in the nursery.

But let's suppose it's true. What does Curius feel, or the Scipios twain? What do Fabricius and the shade of

Camillus,

and Crémara's legion and the valiant lads who fell at Cannae—the dead of all those wars—when a ghost like this descends from the world above? They'd insist on purification, if sulphur and torches were to be had, and a laurel-twig dipped in water.

There, alas, we process in disgrace. Granted, our armies have pushed beyond the Irish coast and the recently captured Orkneys, and also Britain with its paltry ration of darkness. 160
But things go on at the centre of our victorious nation which are not done by our conquered foes. They tell us,

however,

that a Zálaces born in Armenia, even less manly than our *jeunesse dorée*, has given himself to a passionate tribune.

That's what external relations involve. He came as a hostage; but Rome is where 'men' are produced. If lads from abroad are permitted

a longer stay in the city, they'll never be short of lovers.

They'll get rid of their breeches along with their daggers and whips and bridles,

and then return to Artáxata carrying our teen-age morals. 170